either because of internal weakness in the Empire or because of the generalship of the invaders—all defensive measures have broken down and China proper, particularly the North, has been overrun. Again and again peoples from the north have set up dynasties which have ruled part or all of China. We shall run across the more prominent of them in succeeding chapters—several of them in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries of the Christian era, the Liao, the Chin, and the Hsia in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, then the Mongols, and finally the Manchus. In some respects the Russians fall in this same succession, for they, too, are from the north and have attempted to absorb part of China.

Of the main outlying territories, only the lands to the south—in the present Burma and Indo-China—have never been a major threat. The distances from them to the chief centers of Chinese civilization have been too great or the natural barriers too formidable to permit of conquest. These lands, indeed, possibly because of their tropical climate, have been mastered by the Chinese rather than the Chinese from them.

The land boundaries of China have not only influenced climate, given rise to the main rivers of the country, and been the source of repeated invasions, but they have also proved an obstacle (although by no means an insuperable one) to intimate contacts with other civilized portions of the globe. The other leading centers of early cultures—the valleys of Northern India, the highlands of Persia, the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, the Nile Valley, and the basin of the Mediterranean—were separated from the valleys of the Huang Ho and the Yangtze by vast

distances and barriers of mountains, deserts, and seas. Some intercourse there was. Archeology, indeed, more and more leads us to believe that we formerly underestimated both its quantity and its influence. The further research proceeds, the more we are impressed with the contributions of the Chinese to the peoples to the west of them, especially in Central Asia, and of these peoples to the Chinese. Trade was maintained overland, most of it by the natural routes across Sinkiang. In the Tarim basin lived cultured peoples who acted as intermediaries between China and the VTest. Commerce was carried on with lands to the south and west by way of the sea through the ports of South China, but distances proved so